

6/16/2008 This Week in Congress

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June 16, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." This week I delivered a speech in the House of Representatives in recognition of the 75th anniversary of the Robert J. Dole Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center. [Click here](#) to view my remarks. On Wednesday the House passed legislation that authorizes up to \$14.9 billion for Amtrak and high speed rail investment. The legislation would provide capital and operating grants to Amtrak lines throughout the nation and would allow the construction of high-speed rail between heavily populated corridors across the country. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Severe Storms Hit Kansas

Kansans have already experienced several severe storms this year that have brought wind, hail, tornadoes and flooding. Last week, another storm system developed tornadoes that hit the communities of Chapman and Manhattan and other parts of the region on Wednesday night.

After learning of the storm early Thursday morning, I flew back to Kansas and was able to visit Chapman early that afternoon. On the way, I visited by phone with the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) David Paulison as well as Thomas Hall, federal coordinating officer for FEMA in Kansas, about the need for assistance

from the federal government. I was in Chapman throughout the afternoon on Thursday and again on Friday morning to meet with local emergency and government officials and the many residents whose homes were damaged or destroyed. On Thursday, I visited with Adjutant General Tod Bunting and State Senator Jay Emler. I also spent time with local officials including Mayor Bob Gaetz, County Commissioner Joe Nold and Dickinson County Emergency Management Director Brad Homman, who did a tremendous job coordinating search and rescue and the subsequent clean up process. All are working hard under difficult circumstances. I also spoke to USDA Rural Development State Director Chuck Banks about temporary housing for the victims of the storms and what was available. I visited Manhattan late on Thursday for a tour of the damage with City Manager Ron Fehr and Kansas State University President Jon Wefald. Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts and Congresswoman Nancy Boyda were also along for the tour.

In Chapman, damage included more than 80 percent of residences and destruction of churches and schools. In Manhattan, homes and businesses were devastated in the southwest part of the city. Two fatalities and numerous critical and minor injuries have been reported from the severe weather that swept the region. I have asked President Bush to approve any request for federal assistance that is made by the State of Kansas. Federal assistance can help with cleanup and recovery efforts for public facilities and infrastructure. It can also include assistance from federal programs including housing and small business.

The destruction from the storms very much reminds me of Greensburg. We are fortunate that entire towns were not destroyed. The loss of life is a tragedy. Neighbors and friends are already coming together to begin the clean-up and rebuilding process. Thanks to the Red Cross and Salvation Army for its support to the communities.

According to the Adjutant General's office, the City of Chapman is in need of tents, ropes, gloves and trash bags to assist in clean-up efforts. At this time, clothing is not being accepted. Donations can be taken to the checkpoint on the north side of town. [Click here to view photos from my visit to Chapman and to learn about disaster funds that have been set up and additional ways you can help.](#)

I also visited Kanopolis on Friday to view storm damage caused by strong winds, torrential rain and up to 3.5 inch hail. Trees, homes and businesses were battered. Thank you to mayor Sheri Sauers for providing a tour of the community.

Working for Tax Relief for First Responders

This week, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) issued a regulation so public safety officers driving government vehicles will no longer have to pay taxes on the value of their commute to and from work when they are on call in their communities. Last year, I joined the Kansas Association of Counties and the Kansas Emergency Medical Services Association in asking U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson to provide this tax exemption.

Many public safety officers in Kansas, such as emergency medical service and emergency management employees, are on call 24 hours a day to respond to emergencies. While other emergency provider vehicles, including police vehicles, are specifically exempted from a commuting tax by the IRS, public safety officers are treated differently. Especially in rural Kansas, punishing these professionals for having ready access to vehicles while at home substantially reduces response times and diminishes the quality of health care and emergency management for citizens of the state. I am pleased the IRS responded to our request and public safety officers will be allowed to perform their job without interference from the IRS.

The new regulation will now go through a period of public comment before being finalized.

Veterans Committee Looks at Wounded Warrior Progress

The House Committee on Veterans Affairs held a hearing on Wednesday on the progress of the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense in implementing legislation signed into law last year to improve care for service members

wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is important that these improvements be put in place quickly. Our country's heroes and their families deserve quality care and treatment and a strong support system. During the hearing, I called attention to the availability of mental health care services in rural areas and opportunities for increasing access through mental health centers.

As part of my continued effort to make certain soldiers and their families receive adequate mental health service, I recently visited the Wounded Warrior Transition Unit at Fort Riley, Pawnee Mental Health in Junction City and the Mental Health Center of East Central Kansas in Emporia.

Testifying about Health Care Disparities before House Committee

This week, I testified before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health about disparities in health care. I spoke to the Committee about the unique challenges rural Americans face in accessing health care services compared to their urban counterparts and how difficult it is to recruit health care providers to practice in rural settings. In addition, I also encouraged the Committee to make decisions that would reflect these realities when setting policy about the reimbursement rates for hospitals, pharmacies and other rural health care providers. The hearing was a good opportunity to highlight the difficulty some rural Kansans have in accessing health care services and I am hopeful the Committee will work toward addressing these problems. [Click here to read more and view my remarks.](#)

Discussing Federal Motor Carrier and Internal Revenue Service Regulations

On Monday, I helped facilitate a meeting between Marty Patterson of Western Well in Hays and Terry Richardson of TR Service, Inc. in Pratt, both oil servicing businesses, and officials from the Kansas Highway Patrol headquarters in Topeka. The focus of the meeting was in regard to state and federal regulations of hours of service and fuel excise tax issues. I appreciate the time Colonel Terry Maple and Captain Dan Meyer spent visiting with Marty, Terry and me.

Presenting Residents of Rush County Nursing Home with U.S. Flag

In observance of Flag Day, I presented the residents of Rush County Nursing Home and Hospital in LaCrosse with an American flag flown over the U.S. Capitol building. The flag was flown in honor of nursing home resident Icis Eisenhower, whose birthday is Kansas Day - January 29. I enjoyed visiting with residents and staff after the presentation, as well as hearing the National Anthem played by the nursing home bell choir. Resident musicians were joined by Icis Eisenhower, her two daughters Jan North and Elaine Littler and a granddaughter. Thanks to CEO George Stover, Administrator Charlotte Rathke and Director of Activities Linda Calvillo.

You can order American flags through my Web site and request to have them flown over the Capitol. [Click here](#) to learn more about this service.

Attending the Paradise Creek Festival in Plainville

This weekend, I attended the Paradise Creek Festival Barbecue in Plainville. The festival is hosted by the Plainville Saddle Club and includes activities like the Miss Rodeo Plainville Pageant, parade, rodeo, carnival games, watermelon feed and turtle races. The first rodeo was held in 1949. After some years of not having the rodeo, the Club renewed the event in 2000 and has held the festival each year since. The festival is geared towards families and was very well attended this year. I enjoyed seeing many friends at the barbecue.

In the Office

Derrick Sontag of Topeka, Kevin Tubbesing of Shawnee and Lafe Bailey of Sabetha were in with the National Federation of Independent Businesses to discuss tax regulations and the need for affordable health care options for small business owners. Brad Harrelson and Terry Holdren of Topeka were in with Kansas Farm Bureau to talk about rules related to the burning of Conservation Reserve Program acres and Kansas Farm Bureau's participation in the Kansas Energy and Environmental Policy Advisory Group.

Bret Healy of Topeka was in with the Kansas Bioscience Authority (KBA) to give me an update on the progress of the KBA Bioenergy Working Group. Leslie Kaufman of Topeka was in with the Kansas Cooperative Council to discuss enacted provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill and transportation issues affecting Kansas agriculture. Ken Frahm of Colby was in with the Union of Concerned Scientists to talk about the production tax credit for electricity produced from wind energy. Karyn Page of Wichita was in with the Kansas World Trade Center to tell me about upcoming events at the Center.

Yvonne Miller, Valissa Smith and Brett Gordon of Kansas City were in representing the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation to tell me about the need for continued support of the Special Diabetes Program and other research to find a cure for diabetes. Dr. Mark Brady, Dr. John Breth and Dr. Gregory Unruh of the Kansas City area were in representing the Kansas Society of Anesthesiologists to explain the need for equality in services under Medicare and the importance of anesthesiology teaching programs.

Mickey Edwards and Dena Russell of Emporia and Lee and Vivian Wenger of Great Bend were in with the Kansas Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program to discuss expanding the program to provide resources for children as they age out of the court system. Jane Rhys of Topeka, Scott Shepherd of Overland Park and Kathy Brennon from Chanute were in with the Developmental Disabilities Council to discuss the need for long term care services and support.

Members of the Governor's Military Council were in to discuss the Air Force's tanker decision, growth at Fort Riley and other issues important to the military and Kansas. Members included Lt. Governor John Moore of Wichita; John Armbrust, Mike Shilling and Diane Gaede of Manhattan; Mark Edwards and Scott Stuckey of Junction City; Aaron Otto of Topeka; and Andrew Schlapp and Robin Spurrier of Wichita. Ariel Catile and Germell White of Manhattan were in with the DC Talent Search and Upward Bound to share some of the things they learned at the National Student Leadership Congress, put on by the Council for Opportunity in Education.

David Hanson, Lori Church and Terry Tiede of Topeka; Keith Birkhead and Rick Wilborn of McPherson; and Gary Holle of Bremen were in with the Kansas Insurance Association to express their support for legislation that would encourage states to adopt certain building codes. Johnie Johnson and Brian Spurgeon of Hays were in with Nex-Tech Wireless to tell me about Federal Communications Commission policies affecting rural wireless providers.

Chris Wilson of Manhattan, Buena Burger of Clay Center, Carolyn Kleiber of Hillsboro and Abby Dechant of Alma were in with Kansas Agri-Women to talk about the role their organization plays in biotechnology, energy, immigration and transportation. Don and Colleen Reinart of Peabody with Reliance Energy Partners, Jerrod and Danielle Wanklin of Manhattan with Wanklin Oil Company and Greg Noll of Winchester with the Propane Marketers Association of Kansas were in advocating for the propane industry.

Many Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building, including Tim and Carol Sack of Seneca, Lyle and Glenda Stohs of Marysville, Hope Tallent and Nate Owens of Kansas City, Cecil and Janett Jacobs of El Dorado, Aimee Daniels of Chanute, Melanie Watkins and Kris Timmermeyer-Rice of Newton, Joel and Diana Frederick of Lawrence, Johnie Johnson and Brian Spurgeon of Hays and Lee and Vivian Wenger of Great Bend.

Also in were Lou, Tammy, Caleb and Mikala Bradbury of Wellington; Mickey Edwards, Dena Russell and Curtis, Christy, Alex, Mikayla and Trey Simons of Emporia; Gary and Patti Schoenrock, Dick and Margie Pinairie and Mark and Sally Edwards of Junction City; Shelton Milton, Brian Campbell, Jeff Bowman, Suzanne Walenta-Bowman and Anna Jacobs of Wichita; and Jack and Janice Dufield of Liberal brought by their grandson, Holden Fitzgerald.

Several schools brought FFA students by my office to meet with me and take a tour of the Capitol, including Clay Center Community High School, Hill City High School and Marysville High School.

Very truly yours,

Jerry